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NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1108
JOSEPH SULLIVAN

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HANOI'S DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE

ANNCR:

A VIETNAMESE GOODWILL MISSION IS IN SINGAPORE (LEAVES AUGUST 16), ON THE THIRD STOP OF A SOUTHEAST ASIAN TOUR, AS HANOI CONTINUES TO MOVE TOWARD CLOSER TIES WITH ITS NON-COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOSEPH SULLIVAN HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE:

THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION -- HEADED BY DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER PHAM HIEN -- MADE VISITS TO MALAYSIA AND THE PHILIPPINES BEFORE COMING TO SINGAPORE. THE GROUP WILL ALSO VISIT INDONESIA, BURMA, AND LAOS. DURING THEIR STAY IN THE PHILIPPINES, HANOI AND MANILA COMPLETED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. AND EARLIER THIS WEEK, VIETNAM ANNOUNCED THAT THAILAND HAD ACCEPTED AN INVITATION TO SEND AN OFFICIAL DELEGATION TO HANOI SOMETIME IN AUGUST TO DISCUSS NORMAL RELATIONS.

THUS, WITHIN A FEW WEEKS, HANOI WILL HAVE COMPLETED AT LEAST AN INITIAL ROUND OF FENCE-MENDING DIPLOMACY WITH ALL FIVE MEMBER STATES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS. VIETNAM'S SUDDEN DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA CAUGHT FOREIGN OBSERVERS BY SURPRISE, THOUGH IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THE FORMAL REUNIFICATION OF THE TWO VIETNAMS WOULD PROMPT SOME ALTERNATIONS IN HANOI'S FOREIGN POLICY LINES. (OPT) AS THINGS TURNED OUT, THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION LEFT FOR MALAYSIA JUST TWO DAYS AFTER THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MET TO COMPLETE THE REUNIFICATION PROCESS. (END OPT)

HANOI'S SUDDEN INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE ASEAN COUNTRIES IS SURPRISING WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THAT IT WAS ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PRESS WAS DENOUNCING THE ASEAN GROUP AS A MILITARY ALLIANCE IN DISGUISE AND WHAT IT CALLED A LACKEY OF THE UNITED STATES. AN EDITORIAL IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY DAILY, "NHAN DAN," ALSO PROCLAIMED THAT COMMUNIST VICTORIES IN INDOCHINA HAD CREATED THE IMPETUS FOR REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE ELSEWHERE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

(OPT) VIETNAM'S DIPLOMATIC MOVES TOWARD THE PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND WERE TAKEN EVEN THOUGH THE UNITED STATES STILL HAS TROOPS IN BOTH COUNTRIES. HANOI'S POSITION HAS BEEN THAT THE REMOVAL OF AMERICAN TROOPS IS A PREREQUISITE TO ESTABLISHING NORMAL RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. BUT UNDER ITS NEW FORMULA, VIETNAM, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS, WILL HAVE FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ANY COUNTRY THAT DOES NOT ALLOW ANOTHER COUNTRY TO USE IT'S TERRITORY AS A BASE FOR DIRECT OR INDIRECT AGGRESSION IN THE REGION. (END OPT)

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECTS THUS FAR OF THE VIETNAMESE TOUR HAS BEEN THE REFRESHING CANDOR OF THE DELEGATION'S CHIEF SPOKESMAN, PHAM HIEN. IN SINGAPORE, HE TOLD NEWSMEN THAT VIETNAM'S FOREIGN POLICY IS NOT NECESSARILY REFLECTED IN CRITICISM BY THE HANOI PRESS OF NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. VIETNAMESE NEWSPAPERS, HE CLAIMS, ENJOY FREEDOM TO WRITE IN THEIR OWN WAY. AND, DESPITE HANOI PRESS ATTACKS ON ASEAN, HE SAID HE FEELS ASSURED THAT ASEAN IS NOT A MILITARY ALLIANCE AND IS NOT UNDER THE THUMB OF ANY FOREIGN POWER.

SINCE THE END OF THE MILITARY CONFLICT IN INDOCHINA, NORTH VIETNAM'S INTENTIONS HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MAJOR UNANSWERED QUESTIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THERE'S A FEELING BY SOME THAT BEING COMMUNIST, THE VIETNAMESE WOULD WANT TO ESTABLISH AS SOON AS POSSIBLE LIKE-MINDED GOVERNMENTS ELSEWHERE IN THE AREA. BUT OTHERS ARGUE THAT, AT THIS POINT IN TIME, THE VIETNAMESE LEADERSHIP WANTS MOST OF ALL TO MOBILIZE ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE COUNTRY. AND FROM THIS STEMMED THE VIEW THAT HANOI WOULD BE PROMPTED TO ADOPT A CONCILIATORY OR EVEN COOPERATIVE POLICY TOWARD NON-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. CERTAINLY THAT POSITION WOULD BE WELCOMED BY VIETNAM'S NEIGHBORS, WHO MUST BE VIEWING THE CURRENT VIETNAMESE DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE WITH CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM.